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ABSTRACT

This guide for Private Industry Council (PIC) officers, members, and staff is written to assist in planning and overseeing effective programs for youth at risk in the local labor market using resources allocated under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). Section I takes a broad view of the problem of building effective employability development systems. It examines the process of employability development and identifies youth target groups most at risk in failing to make a successful transition to the adult work force. It also considers the program factors that experience has shown to be most critical in achieving positive results for at-risk youth. Section I concludes with a discussion of the potential for tailoring program strategies for youth target groups under JTPA. Section II focuses on what the PIC can do to upgrade the quality of JTPA youth programming. It describes key functions of the PIC and incorporates suggestions for improvement in each of the following areas: building a knowledge base, defining goals and strategic priorities, coordinating resources, setting target group enrollment objectives, setting cost-outcome objectives, establishing competency standards, selecting service deliverers, contracting for results, and overseeing and evaluating youth programs. (YLB)

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THE PIC YOUTH PRIMER:

Improving JTPA Programs for Youth

The National Alliance of Business

1015 15th Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C.

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT THIS GUIDE CAN DO FOR YOU

As a Private Industry Council (PIC) officer, member, or staff person you have entered into a partnership with local government to manage the resources allocated to your area under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). The challenges facing this partnership are substantial. In comparison with the numbers of youth and adults who lack the skills and qualifications needed to compete successfully in the work force, the resources available for training and remediation are scarce. It is your job to see that JTPA dollars are used equitably and effectively in your Service Delivery Area (SDA).

This guide is written to assist you in carrying out an important part of your mission – planning and overseeing effective programs for youth at risk in the local labor market.

Joblessness and lack of adequate preparation for employment among a segment of America's youth constitute a serious problem in today's work force. This problem affects all communities, but those with heavy concentrations of low-income and minority youth are hardest hit. At greatest risk of unemployment are high school dropouts, minority teenagers, and youth in urban and rural poverty areas. Young people from these groups who want to work typically face a 40-50 percent chance of going jobless.

Demographic trends suggest that the problem is not likely to abate. Despite a 10 percent overall reduction in the teenage population, the proportion of minority teens and youth living in poverty continues to grow. Recent improvements in the economy have done little to brighten the outlook for high risk youth. While millions of new jobs have been added to the economy in the past two years, the number of jobs going to low-income and minority youth has decreased. In addition to the more than 3 million unemployed Americans under the age of 25 who are seeking work on an active basis, there are over 2 million youth who express a desire or need for employment but have become discouraged and dropped out of the labor force.[1]

While millions of youth go jobless, employers in a number of growing industries experience a shortage of qualified entry-level workers. Employers complain that many

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[1]Based on Bureau of Labor Statistic Data, taken from: "The Youth Employment Situation", December 1984, published by the Roosevelt Centennial Youth Project.

young job-seekers lack the work orientation, habits, and basic skills needed to be productive on the job. More youth are growing up in single-parent and poverty households and are leaving school inadequately prepared for labor market entry. At the same time that many young Americans are developing the computer literacy and advanced math skills needed to compete in a high-tech economy, the crisis in basic literacy and math skills has reached epidemic proportions among economically disadvantaged youth. The Congressional Budget office estimates that close to 20 percent of the nation's youth leave school without the basic skills needed to compete in the work force.[2]

JTPA dollars alone can't solve the problem, but the Job Training Partnership Act provides an important resource base for fighting youth employment and employability problems in your community. In addition to providing grants for Summer Youth Programs under Title II-B, JTPA requires that 40 percent of the funds available for training under Title II-A be spent on services for youth.

Preparing economically disadvantaged youth for entry into the labor force is a primary purpose of the Act. Local policymakers are encouraged to target JTPA services on dropouts, welfare recipients, minority teenagers and other youth who face substantial employment barriers. National performance standards challenge local JTPA systems to achieve both employment and employability gains for at-risk youth. JTPA allows a wide range of services and training approaches for developing employment competencies and remediating employment barriers, and the Act suggests a number of exemplary program strategies for at-risk youth.

Current evidence indicates that many SDAs are having a difficult time meeting JTPA's challenge to provide effective youth programming. While the Act mandates that 40 percent of II-A funds be expended on youth services, SDAs, on the average, are spending only 26% on youth.[3] At least half of the SDAs across the county failed to meet the youth target goals set by their own Private Industry Councils for the first JTPA program year.

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[2]Congressional Budget Office Improving Youth Employment Prospects: Issues and Options, February 1982.

[3]Grinker-Walker and Associates, N.Y.C., and MDC, Inc., Chapel Hill, N.C.

Also of concern is the failure of many SDA systems to reach those youth who are most seriously at risk. The majority of SDAs currently are not meeting their goals to equitably serve dropout youth. Behind this targeting failure is a strong trend toward short-term, low-cost training which favors youth who have fewer employment barriers and can be more readily placed in unsubsidized jobs. This bias toward shorter, cheaper interventions runs directly counter to a substantial body of research findings on what it takes to achieve effective youth program results.

Quality programming for youth is possible under JTPA. JTPA provides the base for a number of highly successful youth employability development systems across the country. Such systems are not an automatic outgrowth of national policies. They are conceived, created and maintained at the local level. The Private Industry Council plays a major role in making this happen.

This guide is designed to assist you in understanding youth programming issues and tackling the problem of building effective employability development systems.

Section I takes a broad view of this problem. It examines the process that most workers go through in developing employability skills, and identifies youth target groups who are most at risk in failing to make a successful transition to the adult work force. It also considers what experience has taught us about the program factors that are most critical in achieving positive results for at-risk youth. Section I concludes with a discussion of the potential for tailoring program strategies for youth target groups under JTPA.

Section II focuses on what the PIC can do to upgrade the quality of JTPA youth programming. It describes key functions of the PIC and incorporates suggestions for improvement in each of the following areas: building a knowledge base; defining goals and strategic priorities; coordinating resources; setting target group enrollment objectives; setting cost/outcome objectives; establishing competency standards; selecting service deliverers; contracting for results; and overseeing and evaluating youth programs.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Private Industry Councils are faced with an immediate problem – ensuring effective utilization of the funds earmarked for youth under the Job Training Partnership Act. Experience has shown that strategies designed for adults do not necessarily result in effective services for youth – particularly, at-risk youth. Before tackling the substantial task of upgrading JTPA youth programming, PIC members should examine the broader issue of youth employment and employability.

The Process of Employability Development

Employment and employability are not the same thing. Being employed means having a job. For a youth who is not adequately prepared for the workplace, having a job is likely to be a temporary condition. Being employable means possesing the qualities and skills needed to secure a job, maintain employment, and progress in the labor market. For most individuals in our society, employability development is a critical aspect of the passage from adolescence to adulthood.

Research suggests that, with some variation, successful workers go through a common sequence of development in gaining the skills, knowledge, and experience needed to function in the working world. Developing the capacity for stable employment and advancement in the full-time job market requires the acquisition of four basic types of competencies. These are:

1. **basic educational skills** – the computation, reading, writing, and speaking abilities needed to communicate and function in the labor force;
2. **pre-employment skills** – a basic understanding of the labor market and how it functions, the ability to set realistic employment goals, and the techniques for finding a suitable job, taking part in an interview, filling out a job application, and presenting oneself favorably to a potential employer;
3. **work maturity** – knowledge of expected behavior in the workplace (dependability, productivity, ability to take supervision and get along with other) and the ability to meet these expectations on a sustained basis;
4. **job-specific skills** – acquisition of the knowledge and skills needed for a specific occupation or field of work.

As they move toward adulthood, most youth – with occasional setbacks – will gain these competencies through their normal experiences in school, training at home, their network of contacts with friends and family members who work, and personal experience with part-time jobs and community service. A substantial minority of youth, however, do not progress through these sequential stages.

These young people drop out of high school – or manage to get through school without developing the reading, writing, and computation skills or the basic work habits needed to perform adequately in the workplace. Their access to adult contacts who can assist them in identifying and preparing for employment may be severely limited. They may fail in their teenage years to develop any clear idea of what will be expected of them in the workplace, how to look for a job, or how to present themselves to employers. These youth lack both the basis for settling on realistic career goals and the opportunity to develop marketable job skills. For such young people, jobs, at best, are only a temporary solution to unemployment.

Who is at Risk?

For a small but significant segment of the youth population, finding and keeping jobs will be a persistent problem. Research shows that the following groups run the highest risk of experiencing chronic employment problems.[4]

- **School dropouts:**
  High school dropouts are more than twice as likely as graduates to experience long periods of unemployment, and dropouts account for more than half of the total number of youth who are unemployed for periods of 15 weeks or more. When dropouts are employed, they are likely to earn less than graduates, and they are among the most likely of all youth to remain outside the labor force for extended periods of time. Youth from poverty families are more likley to become dropouts. Among minority youth, Hispanics experience the highest rate of high school non-completion.

- **Youth in the labor force who experience long periods of joblessness:**
  Research shows that for out-of-school youth age 19-21 (including both graduates and dropouts) frequent bouts of long-term unemployment are a strong predictor of continued chronic unemployment in adult years.

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[4]This list of at-risk groups in the youth population, derives from: Public/Private Ventures, A Practitioner's Guide: Strategies, Programs, and Resources for Youth Employability Development. Philadelphia, PA. 1984.

- **Youth who are out of the labor force and are not occupied with school, family, or community responsibilities:**
  These youth often have no apparent means of support. They may depend upon help from family members, friends, or strangers or participate actively in the underground economy. They run a high risk of developing a criminal record. Their lack of exposure to the legitimate job market and failure to develop a work history severely limits employment prospects for the future.

- **Youth who are performing poorly in high school:**
  Studies show a significant relationship between academic performance in high school and both employment stability and wages after graduation. Poor attendance and low grades signal high dropout potential. Youth from low-income families are more likely to perform poorly in school.

- **Youth with special barriers:**
  Special factors, such as a physical or mental disability, a criminal record, alcohol or drug abuse, teenage pregnancy or single parenthood, constitute an additional barrier to employment for a substantial number of low-income youth. Hiring youth with special barriers poses risks that many employers may be reluctant to assume.

Lessons From Experience

What can be done for youth at risk in the labor market? The problem, in most communities, is large, complex, and longstanding. To look for solutions that are simple, quick, or complete would be futile. This is not, however, an excuse for doing nothing. Experience has shown that there is much that can be done at the community level to alleviate youth employment and employability problems.

Even marginal improvements and increased coordination within a community's network of schools, labor market institutions, and social service, health, and civic organizations can help to reduce the number of youth who enter the at-risk category. A considerable history of program experience and experimentation across the country suggests that there are also ways to effectively remediate many of the problems experienced by youth currently at risk in the labor market.

What does it take to achieve positive results for at-risk youth? Some of the lessons learned from youth program research and experience over the past ten years are summarized below.[5]

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[5] Erik Butler (Brandeis University Center for Public Service) summarized several of these lessons from experience in Jobs Watch Alert, August 1983, published by the Center for National Policy Review, Catholic University, Washington, D.C. 20064.

Without special targeting and outreach efforts, programs may fail to reach substantial number of at-risk youth. Experience has shown that JTPA programs will not automatically attract at-risk youth at rates commensurate with their incidence in the eligible population. Low achieving students, dropout youth, teenage parents, and juvenile offenders are not typically among those most likely to seek out employment and training interventions. Young people who are both out of school and out of the labor force are particularly difficult to locate, identify, and enlist in programs.

***Short-term strategies sometimes yield good short-term results.** It has been demonstrated, particularly under JTPA, that at-risk youth with a strong desire or need for immediate employment can often be taught rudimentary job finding and securing skills in a short period of time. Job clubs and other "quick fix" strategies are used by many youth programs to achieve a high volume of placements at a low cost. But they are more apt to be successful in securing quick placements for older youth, who have some prior work history, in communities with a critical volume of low-wage high-turnover jobs with low skill requirements.

***Longer-term strategies produce more lasting results.** While short-term efforts may sometimes yield striking placement results for certain types of at-risk youth, these positive results tend to evaporate quickly over time. Logic suggests that longer-term impacts on employment and earnings require longer-term (6 months or more) interventions, and research indicates that this is particularly true for those youth most seriously at risk.

***Comprehensive service strategies work best.** The ability to maintain employment and advance in the labor market requires a combination of basic education, pre-employment, work maturity, and job-specific skills. Multiple deficiencies which cut across these skill areas are prevalent among at-risk youth. A combination of program tools and services are needed to remediate deficiencies and achieve stable employment outcomes for seriously at-risk youth.

***The academic factor is particularly critical.** Training in basic academic skills is an essential element in effective programming for a substantial portion of the at-risk youth population. Educational remediation, as part of a comprehensive employability development strategy, is the single factor most likely to reduce joblessness and increase earnings potential over a person's lifetime.

*The training process should be individualized. In most cases, programs must be equipped to serve a range of youth at varying levels of maturity and stages of employability development and with differing levels of motivation and ability. The goal is to allow participants to improve skill levels progressively, at their own pace. Self-paced training may be more difficult to schedule and manage, but it produces substantial payoffs. Computer-assisted learning approaches require a sizeable front-end investment but have proved highly effective in achieving competency gains over relatively short time periods.

*Training should be directed toward the achievement of specific goals. Even under the best of circumstances, training time is limited. To maximize the impact of the intervention, the program must have a system for assessing participant skills and deficiencies, focusing on realistic priorities, setting specific learning and skill objectives, packaging needed services, monitoring participant progress, and documenting outcomes. Well-designed competency-based systems clearly work best for at-risk youth.

*Cognitive learning is no substitute for "hands-on" experience. A theoretical understanding of what is expected in the working world is not enough. Young people need the opportunity to put their knowledge to practice in a "real" work environment. Direct exposure to the workplace is essential to the process of employability development. The majority of America's workers learn and perfect their occupational skills on-the-job.

*Small employers may be particularly willing to participate in the employability development process. Research indicates that small employers, particularly in the service, hospitality, and retail industries, provide the greatest number of part-time and entry-level jobs for youth. Yet small employers are least likely to be able to shoulder the burden of training new workers. For these employers, program tools such as on-the-job training contracts, tryout employment, and Targeted Jobs Tax Credits offer significant incentives for training and hiring at-risk youth.

*The most effective programs are based upon a collaborative effort. No agency is equipped to do it all alone. Establishing a collaborative relationship among job training specialists, schools, and private employers should be the first step taken in developing employability programs for at-risk youth.

What's Possible Under JTPA? Achieving positive employment and employability results for youth under JTPA, depends upon the development of effective service strategies and delivery systems at the local level. Private Industry Councils, to date, have tended to focus heavily on job placement costs and outcomes. These outcomes, while appropriate for most adults, are not immediately relevant to a youth who lacks a fundamental awareness of the world of work. Most PICs have given less attention to youth programming issues such as who is being served, what training tools and services are being used, and how these services contribute to the employability of youth.

Long-term employability depends upon the development of competencies in four major skill areas: 1) basic education skills; 2) pre-employment skills; 3) work maturity; and 4) job-specific skills. JTPA allows training for youth in each of these skill areas. While the Act makes some suggestions for the types of youth to be served and the services which may be provided in each skill area, it does not provide SDAs with a blueprint for designing comprehensive service strategies and delivery systems for youth.

It is up to local policymakers to determine the following:

- Which skill areas should be addressed by the system?
- What youth should be targeted for service in each skill area?
- What results should training in each skill area achieve?
- What training tools or services should be used to achieve these results?

The following chart list some of the services which can be used under JTPA to assist youth from specific target-groups to achieve employability goals in each of the four major skill areas. Training for employability does not necessarily require the funding of seperate programs for each skill area or target group. The employability characteristics and needs of individual youth participants may cut across target group designations and skill areas. Comprehensive program strategies can be designed to achieve multiple employability development goals.

While the technical aspects of service design and sequencing will generally be handled by youth program specialists, it is up to the Private Industry Council to establish a policy framework which ensures that:

- The service delivery system is designed to reach at-risk youth.
- The services most needed to achieve employability outcomes for at-risk youth are encompassed within the JTPA system.

CHART 1. TARGETING YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES IN FOUR SKILL AREAS

BASIC EDUCATION SKILLS

Target Group:

Potential dropouts, dropouts and out-of-school youth deficient in basic math, reading, writing, and communication skills.

Goals:

- Basic education skills needed for employment
- H. S. Diploma or GED

Services:

Academic assessment and remediation, provided by:

- Mainstream high schools
- Alternative schools
- ABE/GED programs

or

- JTPA Education for Employment and summer remediation components

PRE-EMPLOYMENT SKILLS

Target Group:

Dropouts, in-school youth and unemployed graduates who lack labor market orientation and contacts.

Goals:

- a working understanding of the labor market
- a career plan and realistic employment objective
- job search and self-presentation skills

Services:

Pre-employment workshops, classes, job clubs:

- counseling
- vocational exploration
- career education

WORK MATURITY

Target Group:

Dropouts, in-school youth and unemployed graduates who lack employment experience and work habits.

Goals:

- a positive work history
- work maturity competencies needed to sustain entry-level employment

Services:

- Part-time/summer entry employment experience
- try-out employment
- limited full-time work experience
- volunteer work
- on-the-job training
- temporary unsubsidized employment

JOB-SPECIFIC SKILLS

Target Group:

Unemployed youth with basic work maturity who are ready to develop a career orientation.

Goals:

Specific skills needed for entry in a job field or occupation offering a full-time employment future

Services:

- On-the-job training
- Vocational education
- Institutional skills training
- industry-based skills training

- All services provided under JTPA are directed toward specific employability or employment results.
- Services are provided only to those youth who need assistance in order to achieve employment or employability gains.

The remainder of this section of the guide examines potential targeting strategies and programming tools under JTPA in each of the four major skill areas.

BASIC EDUCATION SKILLS

Purpose of Training: Youth who fail to attain a high school diploma or its equivilent and those who lack basic language, reading, writing, and math skills are at a serious disadvantage in the labor market. While some types of work may be secured without a secondary educational credential or demonstration of basic education competency, deficiencies in these areas will restrict a youth's ability to maintain employment, compete for better paying, more rewarding jobs, participate in vocational training or post-secondary education, or otherwise advance in the labor market.

Target Groups: Three types of youth are at risk in this area: 1) high school dropouts; 2) students whose basic educational deficiencies signal high dropout potential; and 3) youth age 18 to 21 who have managed to graduate but lack the basic reading, writing, verbal, and math skills needed in the workplace.

Goals: Appropriate goals in the area of basic education skills will vary with individual characteristics and status. For potential dropouts, the objective is to bring academic skills up to grade level so that these students can complete school and graduate with their age peers. Younger dropouts should be assisted to return to school whenever possible. For older dropouts, GED completion may be a preferable goals. For out-of-school youth with the most severe educational deficiencies, the goal may be simply to develop the minimum levels of educational competency needed to function in the work force.

Services: The first step in educational remediation is an individual assessment, which documents prior educational attainment, identifies apparent skill defiencies, and measures both functional and cognitive abilities in mathematics and language arts (such as vocabulary, reading comprehension, verbal expression, and writing skills). Assessment provides the basis for training focused on the development of specific educational competencies.

A number of options are available for providing needed educational assessment and remediation. JTPA programs may work cooperatively with the regular school system or with alternative high schools to see that potential dropouts and younger dropouts returning to school receive the assistance they need. JTPA programs may arrange remediation for out-of-school youth through cooperative referral agreements, sub-contracts, or jointly funded efforts with community colleges, vocational-technical institutes, state-funded educational clinics, or other agencies in the community providing basic education, GED preparation, English-as-a-second-language instruction and continuation schools which use vocational curriculum to motivate students to aquire basic skills.

A third option is to establish special educational remediation and skills training components with JTPA funds. Section 205 of JTPA authorizes an exemplary **Education for Employment** program for dropouts and other youth with serious educational deficiencies. This exemplary program option encourages SDAs to develop innovative approaches for teaching basic educational competencies and preparing youth for the GED. SDAs may use mobile vans or establish a network of learning centers in the community which provide individualized or group instruction, using curricula designed to meet state and local specifications. There are a number of excellent curriculum packages on the market which can be used to provide individualized competency-based instruction, with or without the use of computer systems. A number of SDAs have developed special summer programs which combine educational remediation with part-time work experience for high risk youth under Title II-B.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT SKILLS

Purpose of Training: Economically disadvantaged youth often lack the contacts, support system, knowledge of the labor market, self-presentation skills, and job search competencies needed to secure employment on their own. Training and assistance in this area will enable youth to secure appropriate immediate employment and will improve their abilities to secure jobs in the future.

Target Group: Dropouts, in-school youth, and unemployed high school graduates who lack an orientation to the labor market and a network of contacts in the working world will need assistance in this area.

Goals: Appropriate goals in the area of pre-employment skills include: 1) gaining accurate information and a working understanding of the local labor market; 2) developing a longer-term career plan and setting realistic immediate employment objectives; and 3) learning and perfecting the self-presentation and job search techniques needed to secure an entry-level job.

Services: Pre-Employment skills training is generally based on a curriculum package which includes a combination of assessment, counseling, instruction, and applied learning activities. Training usually includes a number of components, such as: orientation to the world of work; career planning; labor market information; and job search techniques. Pre-employment skills training may involve a combination of individual and group activities, provided through JTPA workshops, job clubs, vocational education student youth organizations or classes held in the public schools. Section 205 of JTPA lists **pre-employment skills** training as an exemplary program and specifically authorizes its use for youth as young as age 14-15.

Short term (1-3 weeks) job search training directed at immediate job placement has become the primary youth programming strategy in many SDAs. While this strategy may achieve high placement rates at a low cost per placement, it does not, by itself, constitute an adequate strategy for many at-risk youth. Short-term placement-oriented strategies are most appropriate for eligible youth who: 1) desire and are available for immediate employment; 2) possess the basic education skills and work maturity needed to maintain employment; and 3) lack the labor market awareness, confidence, and self-presentation skills needed to conduct a successful job search on their own.

For at-risk youth who will also be receiving other types of remediation and training while enrolled in JTPA, pre-employment skills training is often split into two components. Work orientation, assessment, and career planning are typically provided at the beginning of the program participation period, and job search training may be used to assist youth in securing jobs after remediation goals have been achieved.

WORK MATURITY

Purpose of Training: The most critical factor in maintaining employment and functioning productively in the labor market, at whatever level, appears to be an individual's willingness and ability to accommodate her or his personal behavior to the expectations of the workplace. While some youth are prepared to effectively meet the expectations of the workplace through their experiences at home and in school, deficiencies in either value orientation or behavioral skills constitute a serious barrier to successful employment adjustment for many economically disadvantaged youth.

Target Group: Youth who may need special training to develop work maturity include: dropouts, in-school youth, and graduates who lack employment experience and are not yet able to demonstrate the basic work habits and attributes of an effective entry-level employee.

Goals: Specific objectives to be achieved while in the program will depend upon an individual's areas of deficiency. Basic goals to be achieved in the area of work maturity include the following: 1) adherence to the rules and norms of conduct (attendance, punctuality, appropriate attire and grooming, etc.); 2) dealing effectively with supervision (following directions, accepting authority, handling criticism positively, etc.); 3) demonstrating good work habits (taking initiative, meeting standards of work quality, accuracy, completion, etc.); 4) demonstrating teamwork skills (functioning cooperatively with fellow workers; handling conflicts constructively, etc.); 5) the ability to accommodate change and learn new skills on the job.

Services: **Entry employment experience** is a generic name for a set of services that are based on the idea that young people learn best by actually doing. Entry employment experience is one of the exemplary programs listed in Section 205 of JTPA. It provides youth with hands-on job experience and a way to demonstrate work maturity competencies. Under the entry employment experience mode, part-time and summer supported work and training opportunities may be established for JTPA youth participants in either the public or the private sector. The choice of sector may depend upon the amount of special assistance required by a given youth. In all situations, quality supervision at the work site is important, and specific learning and behavioral objectives should be set at the outset. Entry employment experience works best as an employability development tool for at-risk youth when it is combined with educational services and when adequate pre-employment skills training has been provided prior to placement.

For youth who are enrolled in an accredited education program and have received adequate pre-employment training, JTPA offers a special program tool called **try-out employment.** Try-out employment is a way to gain entry employment experience in the private sector. Under this mode, the JTPA program pays "compensation in lieu of wages" to a youth participant for up to 250 hours of work and training in a private sector job site. Employers are required to hire participants following completion of the try-out period in all but exceptional cases. The try-out employment mode offers some distinct advantages. Unlike O.J.T. contracts, the employers are fully subsidized and paper work is minimal. The model is especially suitable for working with smaller business and for developing entry level jobs in the service and retail industries.

In some SDAs, work maturity skills are taught and developed in a classroom setting, through volunteer work, vocational exploration programs, or part-time unsubsidized jobs. Traditional work experience (subsidized employment in a public or non-profit agency) is still an option under JTPA for developing work maturity skills. This programming tool is costly, however, and most SDAs use it sparingly for older out-of-school youth who simply aren't ready for on-the-job training or unsubsidized employment.

JOB-SPECIFIC SKILLS

Purpose of Training: The types of jobs in which JTPA-eligible youth most readily find employment are characterized by low skill requirements, high turnover, and limited opportunities for advancement. This type of employment may provide needed income and experience for new labor market entrants and for students who plan to work part-time while preparing for career employment. However, youth who have reached a stage in their employability development at which they are ready to sustain a full-time and permanent labor market attachment may need employment in an occupation or job field which offers better prospects for income, stability, and career advancement. JTPA can provide training in the specific skills needed to gain entry in these fields.

Target Group: Job-Specific skill training is most appropriate for older (age 18-21) unemployed youth with basic work maturity who are ready to develop an occupational orientation. Single parents and other youth with family obligations which require a stable earning capability are a particularly important target group for training in this area.

Goals: The basic goal is attainment of the specific skills needed to gain entry to an appropriate occupation or job field which offers good prospects for a full-time employment future. Specific objectives will depend upon the comptency level of the individual and on entry-level job requirements in the occupational field selected.

Services: Training strategies for developing job-specific skills may be long-term (9 months or more) and focused on a broad array of knowledge and skills encompassed in a given voctional area. But it is more common under JTPA to use shorter-term strategies (three to six months), which focus on the specific skills and key competencies required by local employers in industries with a current demand for entry-level workers. Tools for developing job-specific skills include: institutional skills training, through individual referral to community college, or private business or trade schools or through special JTPA class group training projects; vestibule training provided on-site in selected industries or businesses; and on-the-job training or try-out employment provided by individual employers or public school vocational education programs including area vocational-technical schools and skill centers (programs frequently include both cooperative work experience and classroom instruction). On-the-Job training is the most frequently used mode for assisting JTPA youth participants to achieve job-specific skills. The major advantages of OJT are that it can be tailored to the career interests and abilities of individual participants and it provides a direct connection to continued employment on an unsubsidized basis. Some SDAs have established cooperative linkages with school district vocational education programs to provide summertime or after-hours skill training for JTPA-eligible youth. For youth whose educational deficiencies are not too extensive, remediation in basic skills can often be provided in conjunction with job-specific skills training.

II. WHAT CAN THE PIC DO?

The Private Industry Council is in a key position to upgrade the quality of JTPA youth programming. PIC policies and decisions can provide the framework for developing and maintaining effective employment and employability development strategies for at-risk youth.

The remainder of this guidebook examines nine key functions of the Private Industry Council and offers suggestions for maximizing PIC effectiveness in planning and overseeing youth programming strategies.

Building a Knowledge Base

Good decisions don't happen by accident. Even the most thoughtful and perceptive policymakers can't make effective decisions if they don't have the needed background information. The decisions you make on youth policies and programs should be based upon an accurate knowledge and understanding of the local labor market and the eligible youth population, as well as a realistic appraisal of programming options for your own Service Delivery Area.

In building a local knowledge base for youth programming, some of the primary questions to be addressed are:

- What employment opportunities are available or potentially available in our community for young people with limited experience and education?
- What specific attributes, skills, and qualifications do employers look for in entry-level workers? What does it take to advance in the local job market?
- What are the most common employment barriers and employability deficiencies among economically disadvantaged youth in our SDA?
- Which youth are most seriously at-risk in the labor market?
- What are the characteristics, size, and geographic distribution of at-risk target groups within our SDA?
- To what extent are the employment problems of at-risk youth currently being addressed by the JTPA system, the public school system, and other youth serving programs and agencies?
- What are the gaps in services for at-risk youth?
- What impact is the current JTPA system having? What youth are being served? What services are they receiving? How effective are current strategies in achieving employment and employability outcomes for at-risk youth?
- How might JTPA resources and strategies be targeted to maximize impact in achieving employability and employment results for at-risk youth?

Sources of information needed to address these questions are available within your Service Delivery Area. They include:

- Employment Security Department demographic and labor market reports;
- 1980 U.S. Census reports, Social Indicators for Planning and Evaluation, available for each SDA through the U.S. Labor Department, Employment and Training Administration, Regional Offices;
- State education agencies, local school districts, juvenile justice agencies, welfare offices, WIN programs, and other youth serving systems;
- Chamber of Commerce, economic development, and industrial promotion offices, or university-based business and economic research bureaus;
- JTPA Management Information Systems, monitoring reports, and special program evaluations;
- Surveys or structured interviews with employers hiring economically disadvantaged youth.
- Technical assistance guides listed in the appendix to this publication.

Identifying the most useful information sources in your community and collecting and interpreting pertinent information will require special efforts on the part of your PIC staff. Some PICs have elected to bring in outside researchers to conduct special youth needs assessments and to analyze and present policy options to the PIC. Other PICs have appointed youth task forces or subcommittees with representatives from the business community, schools, and other youth-serving agencies to work closely with staff on developing a knowledge base for youth programming.

Whatever option you chose, you will want to maximize the results of your research efforts. Here are some general rules of thumb:

- Original research is expensive. Before generating new information, make use of existing data sources.
- Identify and draw on a variety of information sources.
- Consider qualitative input from personal interviews, expert testimony or public hearings, as well as statistical data.
- Expect to encounter discrepancies and gaps in available information.
- Be prepared to accept "educated estimates".
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Look at what other SDAs are doing. Make use of technical assistance guides and national research findings.
- Be willing to proceed with working premises rather final answers.

Defining Goals and Strategic Priorities

Given a basic understanding of youth employment problems and service options in the SDA, Private Industry Councils are in a position to establish a framework of local goals and priorities that will provide the basis for effective youth policies and program decisions. Establishing this framework requires a consensus among local policy makers regarding both strategic priorities (how the JTPA system will be focused in regard to youth) and goals for participants (what employment or employability outcomes will be pursued).

In considering appropriate goals for youth participants, it should be clear to PIC members that youth in the JTPA-eligible population have differing types of employability deficiencies and employment needs. Programs can assist youth in overcoming a variety of employment barriers and developing a range of skills needed to make an effective labor market adjustment. It may be useful for the PIC to begin by delineating the goals which seem most appropriate for various types of youth. One PIC came up with the following list of potential goals:

- Assist unemployed out-of-school youth in obtaining stable, unsubsidized employment.
- Assist all youth served in developing career-related goals and putting together career preparation strategies that they can pursue through program participation and on their own after completion.
- Assist inexperienced youth in understanding the local job market and in developing the job search and presentation skills needed to secure an entry-level job.
- Assist inexperienced youth in gaining work experience and developing and demonstrating the work habits, maturity, and competencies needed to successfully compete and maintain employment in the entry-level job market.
- Assist older youth who are full-time labor force participants in developing the occupational and job-specific skills needed to compete and maintain employment in selected industries or job fields which offer potential for career employment.

Before these goals can be translated into measurable outcome objectives and linked to specific service strategies, some priorities must be established. In setting priorities for youth programming, PICs are faced with a number of strategic options. Some of the options to be considered are described below.

In earmarking resources to be used for youth employment and training services: Should the PIC promote efforts to expand the resource base for youth programming by seeking additional funds or services from special State JTPA grants or other public or private sources or should it focus exclusively on the utilization of JTPA Title II-A and II-B dollars?

In developing coordination agreements and linkages with other programs: Should PIC strategy focus on promoting improvements in the overall system of education, training, and job placement for economically disadvantaged youth or should it focus exclusively on achieving positive outcomes for youth served by JTPA programs?

In enlisting the involvement of private industry: Should the strategy be to expand the numbers and types of employment and training oportunities for eligible youth or should it focus more heavily on meeting existing employer needs for job-ready youth?

In targeting participants: Should the JTPA strategy be to enroll a broad mix of eligible youth with varying levels of employment readiness and range of different employability deficiencies, as found within the eligible pool, or should programs seek out specific types of youth (such as those most in need of employment or those with specific types of deficiencies) for enrollment?

In developing a service strategy: To what extent should the PIC delineate the mix of services and service delivery approaches which may be used to achieve specified outcome goals? To what extent should these decisions be left to program contractors and operators?

While these strategic options need not be addressed strictly in "either/or" terms, it should be apparent to policymakers that certain trade-offs are involved in establishing strategic priorities. The youth programming goals and priorities adopted by the PIC should reflect local conditions and value orientations. Developing the consensus needed for an explicit statement of youth goals and priorities will involve considerable discussion and debate. It is worth the effort. This statement provides the conceptual base for assembling resources, setting target group enrollment objectives, establishing cost/outcomes objectives, developing competency standards, and formulating criteria for contractor selection and program funding.

Coordinating Resources

JTPA provides SDAs with direct access to two sources of funding for youth programs. To ensure that youth (16 to 21) will receive a substantial share of program resources

on a year-round basis, JTPA sets a minimum expenditure requirement for youth services under Title II-A. While youth account for about 23 percent of the population eligible for JTPA on a nation-wide basis, the legislation requires that no less than 40 percent of the II-A funds available for services shall be expended on youth. In addition, Title II-B funds are earmarked exclusively for youth programming to be conducted during the summer months.

In most SDAs, Title II-B grants for Summer Programming are considerably larger than the II-A allocation for year-round youth programming. There is less federal pressure to achieve specific employment and employability outcomes from summer program expenditures. Many SDAs have developed a pattern of relying heavily on work experience projects with limited training content under II-B, while concentrating on placement-oriented, short-term training under II-A.

PICs increasingly are seeking creative ways to combat the "three months feast/nine months famine" syndrome. The current II-A/II-B funding imbalance makes it difficult to sustain effective employability development programming for youth on a year-round basis, but it can be done if policymakers take a coordinated approach to youth planning. Some PICs have begun by redirecting summer programming – away from traditional work experience; toward comprehensive strategies which combine educational remediation, counseling, and pre-employment skills training with upgraded entry employment experience. II-A/II-B co-enrollment strategies can be used to minimize the summer enrollment bulge and achieve a more uniform level of programming throughout the year.

In addition to II-A and II-B grants, policymakers should consider other sources of funding for youth employability development. Alternative funding sources include: JTPA 8 percent set-asides for educationally linked programs; the Targeted Jobs Tax Credit Program; and dollars available through business and industrial associations, trade unions, Community Development Block Grants, and state and local education agencies. In-kind contributions, such as technical assistance in program design, educational services, on-loan training or supervisory staff, facilities, equipment, supplies, and child care, transportation and other support services, can be just as valuable as monetary contributions.

Vocational education provides a unique opportunity to coordinate efforts and resources which satisfy federal legisalative requirements. In particular, JTPA eligible participants (in school and returning to school vocational education students) can be

identified and referred to JTPA, if enrololed, special remedial or ancillary services can be made available through vocational education programs currently serving economically/academically disadvantage youth.

Given the magnitude of youth employment and employability problems and the relative scarcity of public funding, th. arguments for coordinated planning and programming are compelling. Substantial coordination is more likely to result if linkages are initiated at the policy level, through the Private Industry Council, rather than being left to program operators.

Setting Target Group Enrollment Objectives

The targeting priorities and goals established by the PIC must be translated into measurable performance objectives. Most PICs set annual enrollment objectives for specific target groups or key segments of the eligible youth population to be served under II-A and II-B programs. In addition to system-wide objectives, some Private Industry Councils set specific target group enrollment objectives for individual contractors, projects, or program components.

These enrollment objectives are an important policy tool. They provide a basis for designing service strategies and for ensuring that the programs actually serve those segments of the youth population they are intended to serve.

In setting target group enrollment objectives, there are three major considerations: 1) equity; 2) need; and 3) ability to serve.

Equity considerations dictate that significant segments of the youth population be served under JTPA at levels at least equivilent to their proportional representation in the eligible population. Equity is a particular concern for those groups, such as minority youth, who tend to experience higher rates of poverty in comparison with other segments of the youth population. JTPA requires that certain target groups - high school dropouts and AFDC WIN registrants – be served at rates commensurate with their incidence in the economically disadvantaged population.

Under JTPA, **"need"** considerations must be balanced against **ability to serve.** Youth employment and training programs in the past tended to focus on the "most in need". Individuals or groups who were judged to have the most pressing income needs and to be least apt to secure employment were generally given priority in selecting participants for CETA work experience and classroom training programs. CETA programs provided income subsidization for extended periods of time (sometimes 2-4 years) and had minimal job placement requirements. JTPA continues to stress services

for at-risk youth with substantial barriers to employment. But JTPA's emphasis on achieving employment and employability results at a reasonable cost, and its prohibitations against long-term subsidies, has tended to shift the targeting focus. Basic motivation to work, ability to devote the time and effort required to participate effectively in intensive training activities, and the apparent potential to achieve some type of positive outcome within the time frame and service formats allowed under JTPA are now the practical criteria for participation in youth programs.

Need factors should be considered in setting JTPA target group enrollment objectives; it is with the most seriously at-risk youth that program investments can yield their greatest long-term payoffs. But youth with severe and multiple employment barriers are costly to serve and positive post-program outcomes are less certain. Few PICs will choose to focus youth programming exclusively on the hardest to serve target groups. For most SDAs, the aim will be to achieve a targeting balance between the most seriously at-risk youth and those with fewer employment barriers.

Some of the issues involved in setting enrollment objectives for specific targets groups are discussed briefly below.

- **Minorities:** The proportion of the eligible population comprised by racial and ethnic minorities varies widely by State and SDA. But in nearly all communities, minority youth - Black, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, or others — face disproportionate chances of unemployment and poverty. Concern for equity requires that minorities be targeted for JTPA enrollment at levels at least commensurate with their incidence in the economically disadvantaged youth population.

- **Gender targeting:** Enrollment objectives in this area are generally set to ensure that females receive a fair share of program services. While employment and training programs, generally, have been more effective in attracting and enrolling males, some SDAs have been able to boost the youth enrollment share of females to levels above 60 percent. Before setting higher enrollment objectives for young women, PICs should analyze the composition of the eligible youth population. In some geographic areas, males comprise a greater proportion of the at-risk youth population.

- **Age targeting:** 16 to 19 year olds comprise the primary target group for JTPA youth programming in most SDAs. Many SDAs serve young people age 20-21 in both youth and adult program systems. Some SDAs set specific enrollment objectives for older youth in adult programs. JTPA also allows exemplary and summer programming for youth 14-15 years old. Before setting enrollment objectives by age, a PIC should examine the age distribution of the eligible population within its SDA, as well as age distribution within specific at-risk target groups. An age-specific enrollment objective may reflect the strategic orientation of the PIC. Prevention strategies focus more heavily on younger target groups, while crisis intervention strategies will tend to focus on out-of-school youth who are unemployed or out of the work force.

- **Dropouts:** JTPA requires that dropouts be enrolled on an equitable basis. The proportion of the eligible youth population conprised by dropouts varies widely by SDA. While all dropouts face employment barriers, levels, of basic skills and employability will vary considerably among eligible youth dropouts. Some dropouts will be able to secure a GED and prepare for job-entry with minimal training investment. Others will require substantial remediation of achieve the minimal levels of basic skills needed to sustain employment. High quality programming for dropouts is expensive. To achieve positive results for this target group at a reasonble cost generally requires working linkages with education and community service agencies. To ensure that service delivery systems are adequately deployed to achieve dropout enrollment objectives, PICs should analyze the geographic distribution of youth dropouts within the SDA.
- **Welfare recipients:** Youth welfare recipients fall into two major categories: 1) primary recipients, often with dependents, who receive their own public assistant grants; and 2) youth who are dependents in welfare receiving households. All youth welfare recipients are eligible for JTPA. In many SDAs, the incidence of welfare recipients in the eligible youth population is somewhat greater than that in the adult population – though youth generally comprise a smaller portion of the WIN registrant population/mandated for JTPA services. JTPA in-school programs have experienced relatively little difficulty enrolling and serving youth under 18 from welfare dependent families. Primary welfare recipients are a harder group to reach and serve. The majority are females with infants or young children. Many are high school dropouts with limited work experience. To make the transition from welfare to work feasible for these young women, long-term, more costly program strategies may be needed, which combine educational remediation and credentialing with pre-employment skills training and/or occupational skills training. Child care and counseling services are an important element in programming for this group.

Target groups for youth employment and training programs have, traditionally, been identified on the basis of **demographic** characteristics, such as race/ethnicity, gender, age, and school enrollment/completion status – rather than other **employability** characteristics. This is partly because the types of data available for planning favor the grouping of populations by demographic characteristics. These characteristics also tend to be more readily identifiable when recruiting and enrolling participants. While demographic designations may be important in ensuring the equitable distribution of resources, they are often less useful in targeting service strategies. Other target groups for PICs to consider in setting program enrollment objectives include:

- Youth with very limited labor market exposure.
- Youth who have experienced long periods of unemployment (15 weeks or more).
- Youth with serious basic skills deficiencies.
- Youth with physical or mental dissabilities that affect their employment prospects.
- Youth with a criminal record.

Setting Cost/Outcome Objectives

JTPA puts a strong emphasis on program performance and accountability. Programs must demonstrate their ability to achieve positive results at a reasonable cost. SDAs are required to set overall performance objectives for youth programming in their annual job training plans. These performance objectives specify – in measurable terms – the desired employment and employability outcomes for youth participants and the cost at which these outcomes should be achieved.

According to the Secretary of Labor, JTPA is designed to be a performance-driven program and performance standards are the tool to assure that the program is a productive investment in human capital. At the national level, three indicators have been established for assessing JTPA program performance in regard to youth. For this year, they are: 1) entered employment rate; 2) positive termination rate; and 3) cost per positive termination. The Department of Labor has set national performance standards for each of these indicators. For the program year beginning July 1, 1986, it is likely that these standards will change somewhat and may reflect particular achievement of youth employment competencies.

JTPA gives Governors the power to determine how these performance standards will be applied and how performance incentive funds will be awarded to SDAs within each state. Because of financial incentives and potential sanctions involved, policymakers will want to consider national/state performance standards in planning, contracting, monitoring and assessing SDA youth programming. PIC planners should understand the adjustment criteria used by the state and be able to use these criteria to project how differences in youth program design might affect performance expectations for your SDA.

While the PIC will want to set performance objectives which are at least as stringent as the national standards, you should look beyond national or state criteria in establishing cost and output objectives for youth programs. Local performance objectives should reflect the youth programming priorities and goals established by local policymakers.

Some of the issues involved in setting output objectives in the three major youth program performance categories are considered below.

Entered Employment Rate

The entered employment rate is also referred to as the job placement or placement rate. It is a measure of the percentage of youth terminees who secure unsubsidized jobs upon leaving JTPA programs.

Job placement is an important goal of youth programming. The national standard for the youth entered employment rate has been set at 41 percent. JTPA, however, places less emphasis on placement outcomes for youth than for adult participants, recognizing that: 1) it may be more difficult to secure jobs for youth participants in the unsubsidized labor market; 2) job placement is not the most appropriate immediate outcome for all youth completing JTPA programs; 3) job placement is not the most reliable indicator of the program's effectiveness in improving the longer-term employment prospects of at-risk youth.

The placement rate is a measure of program performance in achieving employment goals. It may indicate the programs' relative effectiveness in meeting both the needs of participants for jobs, and the needs of employers for workers. In itself, the placement rate does not measure the quality of the jobs being secured, the types of youth who are being enrolled and placed, the relationship between placement jobs and the training provided by the program, or the extent to which youth retain employment after they have been placed. Other measures can be developed by the PIC to gauge performance in these areas.

In specifying placement rates for youth programs, policymakers may wish to consider the desired relationship between employment and employability development. Placements can be achieved through very short-term strategies designed to match job-ready youth with existing job openings or it can be achieved after a period of assessment and training designed to develop employability skills or competencies. Some PICs have set a limit on the number of "direct" placements allowed youth program operators.

Setting very high placement rates for youth programming may discourage operators from taking the risk of enrolling less job-ready youth who face greater barriers to employment. While most SDAs have been able to exceed national standards for youth placements by a considerable margin, lower placement rates should be expected for those programs that serve greater percentages of seriously at-risk youth.

Positive Termination Rate

The positive termination rate is an indicator which is unique to youth programs. It recognizes that there are a range of possible positive outcomes for youth who participate in JTPA programs. Positive termination outcomes include the following:

- o Entering employment (unsubsidized employment on a full or part-time basis).
- o Return to school for dropouts.
- o Completion of a major level of education (elementary, secondary, or post-secondary).
- o Entering registered apprenticeship programs, the armed forces, or non-Title II training.
- o Attainment of PIC-approved employment competencies.

The positive termination rate is computed by dividing the total number of youth terminated into the number of youth who fit into one or more of the positive termination categories. The positive termination rate is a combined measure of the program's effectiveness in achieving both employment (job placement) and employability development (other positive terminations) outcomes for youth.

By setting the national standard for the youth positive termination rate at 82 percent and the standard for the youth placement rate at 41 percent, the Secretary of Labor has placed equal weight on the achievement of employment and employability development outcomes. The positive termination rate performance standard leaves room for youth program strategies in which job placement is not the only — or even the most important goal. But the performance standard also stresses accountability in demonstrating specific employability gains.

The inclusion of PIC-approved competency attainment as a positive termination outcome is a new provision of youth programming under JTPA. The intent of this provision is clear — to stimulate local accountability in identifying, measuring, and achieving specific employability gains for youth participants. While SDAs are not required to establish youth employment competency systems, those lacking such systems may have difficulty meeting the specified performance standard for positive terminations. SDA programs which serve a high proportion of seriously at-risk youth may find it especially difficult to meet the positive termination standard unless they are able to assess and document competency attainment outcomes.

SDAs with effective competency-based employability development programs should not find it difficult to meet the positive termination objectives set by the PIC. A

substantial proportion of the participants in such programs should be able to achieve both job placement and employability enhancement outcomes.

Cost Per Positive Termination

The cost per positive termination is another JTPA performance measure which is unique to youth programming. It is computed by dividing the number of positive youth terminations into the total number of dollars expended on youth services. A SDA positive termination cost objective should reflect both employment and employability development objectives for youth programming and indicate the cost at which these objectives are to be achieved. Experience to date under JTPA suggests that SDAs should be able to achieve employment and employability gains for a mix of eligible youth at or below the national cost per positive termination standard of $4,900.

In setting positive termination cost objectives for youth programs, local policymakers will be placing some parameters on the average duration and intensity of services to be provided. Policymakers will naturally want to encourage operators to achieve as many positive terminations as possible by keeping unit costs down. However, substantial cutbacks in the price the PIC/SDA is willing to pay per positive termination will have a substantial effect on who the programs are able to serve, what type of services can be provided, and what can be achieved. Programming designed to achieve both employment and employability outcomes for a mix of youth at varying levels of employability development with a range of competency deficiencies and employment barriers will require a considerably higher cost per positive termination allowance than short-term job search programming designed to place more employable youth directly in unsubsidized jobs.

Establishing Competency Standards

PIC-approved employment competency standards are the key to effective and accountable youth employability development programs. A well-designed competency system meets the following criteria:

- Desired competencies are identified and clearly stated in terms of what employable workers are expected to do, know, or demonstrate.
- Acceptable standards of achievement are identified and specified for each competency. These standards are expressed in measurable terms.
- The specified competencies and standards are accepted by employers and others in the community as reflecting necessary and satisfactory levels of performance for, at least, entry-level employment.

- o Uniform and reliable methods are employed to measure a participant's attainment of competency standards.
- o Training curricula and services are designed to assist participants in achieving competencies at the specified level of performance.
- o A record is kept of the competencies attempted and achieved while a person is in the program. The record is used to document and certify participant employability following program completion.

The PIC may establish employment competency standards in each of the four major skill aresa: basic education skills; pre-employment skills; work maturity; and job-specific skills. These competency standards will provide a basis for directing youth service strategies toward specific employability outcomes in each skill area.

Competency-based training can maximize the benefits of program participation for at-risk youth. Individual needs can be readily identified and addressed because assessment is done on an individual basis, and the services provided by the program are designed to remediate identified competency deficiencies. Specific attainable objectives can be set for each participants in terms which are measureable and clear to both the participant and the program staff. PIC competency standards, based on employer input, offer youth a realistic picture of job market requirements and their own level of employability. From the PIC perspective, establishing employment competencies for youth programming offers a number of distinct advantages, including:

- o Allowing the SDA to more readily achieve its performance standards for youth;
- o Linking the JTPA youth system with the employment community by building employer expectations and standards into the training process and providing documentation which can be used for employer hiring decisions;
- o Improving program planning and design by using competency standards as a basis for developing, upgrading, targeting, and integrating services;
- o Increasing client motivation by establishing explicit and achievable goals.
- o Facilitating more meaningful evaluation by using competency attainment data as a basis for assessing the performance of youth program contractors, components, and overall systems.

PICs who want to establish employment competency standards do not need to start at ground zero. A number of excellent models have been implemented by PICs across the country who are willing to share their suggestions and techniques. A highly readable guide published by the National Association of Private Industry Councils (referenced in the appendix) outlines simple steps that the PIC can follow to identify appropriate employment competencies for youth in your SDA. In addition, the National Alliance of

Business provides customized training and technical assistance to PICs and program operators, alike.

Selecting Service Deliverers

The selection of youth service deliverers figures among the most critical decisions of local policymakers. Service delivery organizations should not be viewed as "vendors" which can be changed at will. They are the lifeline of the youth employment and training system. It is the program operators who translate the policies and plans approved by the PIC into operational systems that teach skills, develops employability, and improve the employment prospects of youth participants.

The methods used by the PIC to select youth program operators and assign service delivery roles will depend, to a large extent, on local circumstances and options. In larger metropolitan SDAs, there may be an extensive network of community organizations, private firms, public agencies, and educational institutions actively involved with at-risk youth and eager to play a role in the JTPA system. In small rural SDAs, potential youth program operators may be limited to one or two choices.

Some PICs or SDAs elect to operate portions or all of the youth delivery system "in-house" (under the direct management of the PIC). The in-house operations mode may be used to develop specialized service strategies. It provides local policymakers with maximum control over programming and may be the preferred mode when there is a dearth of outside organizations with the interest or capabilities to meet PIC priorities and objectives. While there are legitimate reasons for taking an in-house approach to service delivery, most PICs prefer to concentrate their efforts on policy, planning, and oversight roles and to contract with outside organizations for the delivery of youth programs.

How many programs or contractors should be funded? In some SDAs, a single organization serves as prime contractor for all JTPA youth services. This approach seems to be most attractive for SDAs with a large territory to cover and a relatively small youth resource base. The single deliverer approach allows for maximum integration and coordination of services, streamlines contract management, and minimizes administrative overhead.

The majority of SDAs, however, use two or more major youth service deliverers. In multi-operator systems, delivery roles may be divided along geographic lines (such as city/county), target group focus (such as in-school/out-of-school), or service strategy

(such as job club vs. comprehensive programming). The chief benefit of a multi-operator system is the opportunity to maximize use of existing delivery capabilities, special facilities or training expertise, target group access, and linkages with non-JTPA programs and services. The major drawback to using a number of different operators is the increased potential for duplication and lack of services integration.

Local policymakers will have to decide whether youth program contractors will be determined through a non-competitive, limited bid, or open-bid process. This decision may be influenced by the number of potential operators available within the SDA and the relative level of satisfaction with the current operations set-up. A full scale, open-bid RFP process is a major undertaking which draws heavily on staff resources and on the time and energy of PIC members and other volunteers who identify the rating criteria, read and rate proposals, and make funding recommendations. But this process, used periodically, is a good way to bring in new ideas and operating capabilities, to stimulate healthy competition, and to get comparative data on potential costs and service delivery options.

Even if policymakers are fully satisfied with existing operators or do not see viable alternatives, there are some good reasons for going through an RFP process. The process requires PIC members to get actively involved in reviewing proposals. This is a good way for PIC members to increase their awareness and understanding of program design and service dleivery issues. Having gone through the RFP process, a PIC is more likely to develop a sense of investment in the youth service delivery system.

A PIC-directed RFP process will also require operators to respond to specific policy guidelines which may involve a shift in target group, service mix, costs, or outcomes emphasis. PICs that are in the process of developing new competency guidelines and upgrading youth employability development strategies may find it a particularly opportune time to design new RFP specifications and to open up the bidding process.

Some of the criteria for selecting youth program operators, will be the same as those used in selecting adult deliverers, but there are a number of special concerns. Access to PIC-specified target groups is a key consideration in selecting youth operators. Service capabilities are also critical. To what extent do the services offered – and the ways in which these services are to be packaged and delivered – reflect an understanding of target group needs and the ability to achieve PIC employability development objectives?

If the PIC wishes to fund a comprehensive, competency-based youth program, the operator must be capable of providing and coordinating a full-range of assessment, employability development, and employment services. The ability to access services and coordinate with non-JTPA funding sources and programs is a very important criteria in the selection of youth program operators. Specialized service capabilities and linkages take time to develop and should be varied as long-term investments in system building.

Contracting For Results

Whether a PIC awards funding after a competitive bid process involving a number of organizations or is merely continuing its funding of a single program opertor, the PIC or its public partner will be required to negotiate a contract for the delivery of youth services. Developing an effective contract requires, among other things, a cooperative working relationship. The process should not be a win/lose situation. The contract provides the legal and financial basis for a partnership which should serve the interests of both parties, the participants, and the public at large.

Unit price contracting, sometimes referred to as "performance-based" contracting is a growing practice under JTPA. If this process is not being used in your SDA, chances are that it has, at least, been discussed and considered by the PIC. Fixed unit price contracts offer some significant advantages. First, they allow for greater simplicity in cost-accounting and increased flexibility in covering and reporting SDA administrative costs. In complex systems with a large number of contractors, fixed unit pricing may be viewed as an administrative survival strategy. Equally attractive to most PICs is the ability, under this contracting mode, to link payments to contractors with specific performance results.

The major problem with fixed unit price contracting to date, has been the tendency of this approach to rivet PIC focus on the "bottom line" i.e., achieving the greatest number of placements at the lowest possible cost, without considering who is served, what services are provided, and what employability gains are being achieved.

While JTPA regulations allows for incremental payments to contractors at various stages in a participant's training or enrollment period, full payment of the fixed-unit price was originally required to be contingent upon job placement. An amendment to the JTPA regulations, authorized under the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act, will allow full payment on fixed-unit price contracts for the attainment of other positive termination outcomes for youth – including the achievement of PIC-approved

employment competencies, as a substitute for placement as the sole allowable outcome.

Whatever contracting mode is employed by the PIC/SDA, contracts should support rather than constrain program design. Operators saddled with high placement/minimal cost contracts will lack financial means and incentives for serving at-risk youth or for providing substantial employability development training. Some competitiveness in contract pricing or cost-ceilings is a good thing; it encourages tight management and the development of linkages with non-JTPA funding sources. But contract prices or cost ceilings should be high enough to allow for the desired mix and sequencing of employability development services. And payments to contractors should be staged in a manner which takes into account the way costs are incurred and paid out by the program operators.

Finally, contracts should be specific about both the employment and employability development results to be achieved and the target groups to be served. Performance incentives should be available for contractors who are able and willing to achieve specified employability gains for the most seriously at-risk youth.

Overseeing and Evaluating

The functions of oversight and evaluation run to the core of a PIC's youth programming responsibilities. Oversight includes regular monitoring of system and program performance to ensure that problems are identified, needed corrective action is implemented, and local objectives and JTPA requirements are being met on an ongoing basis. Evaluation encompasses a variety of efforts to assess the effectiveness and impact of youth program policies, plans, and programs.

Oversight and evaluation should give the PIC a clear picture of who is being served, what services are being provided, and what outcomes are being achieved. This information will improve the knowledge base for program planning.

The PIC should be able to determine whether the youth being served have the characteristics and employability development needs the programs were intended to meet. In a developmental program system, particular service components or programs may be targeted to the employability needs of a specific subset of the eligible population. Is the programming designed for dropouts actually serving dropouts? Is the program designed for potential dropouts with basic skills deficiencies actually reaching those students most at risk? Developmental programming puts a higher premium on knowing specifically who the program is serving. An analysis of

participant characteristics and employability deficiencies (derived from client intake and assessment records) may provide the basis for adjusting or redirecting youth targeting objectives.

An important consideration in monitoring youth program is the need to focus on both the kinds and amount of services that are actually being provided. JTPA provides an opportunity for designing new service strategies. Program planners and operators will sometimes miss the mark in judging the correct proportions of services needed to get the job done. Which services are being used more heavily than originally planned? Which services are being used less? Why might service needs be different than planned? Policymakers should be prepared to make or allow for needed adjustments in the service mix.

Monitoring of developmental youth programs should go beyond simple "planned" versus "actual" performance comparisons. It should contribute to the PIC's understanding of what gets done and how it gets done, and it should also facilitate better working relationships with youth program operators. Open communication and cooperative working relationships with program operators will enable the PIC to more readily identify those components in need of improvement or reduction, as well as those that offer the potential for expansion, and to make needed adjustments on a timely basis. A PIC can facilitate this process by conducting on-site visits, holding open question and answer sessions, and listening responsively to input from program operators.

Program operators are not likely to be able to predict precisely all the outcomes of new program designs. It will generally be much easier for program operators to project placements results than, to specify the precise outcomes of new competency-based approaches. The monitoring/evaluation effort should strive to identify all those outcomes that the program is getting as well as those that it is not getting. The focus should be on learning what things are, or are not, working. The monitoring process needs to keep an eye open for unanticipated outcomes which could provide valualable insights regarding how the local youth labor market operates.

In examining placement outcomes, it is particularly important to analyze where the placement are occuring. What kinds of employers are hiring youth participants? For what kinds of jobs? This information helps the PIC to gain a clearer picture of the size, shape, and structure of the youth labor market. This kind of understanding is, in turn, an important step in improving local strategies for youth employment and employability development.

In assessing the cost and outcome performance of various programs, PIC/SDA evaluators should first make a careful examination of exactly what each program is doing and who it is serving. With an understanding of what the programs are doing, costs can be compared on a realistic basis – apples with apples, oranges with oranges, placement-only programs with placement-only programs, developmental programs with developmental programs.

Finally, follow-up over the long-term is a necessity for judging the effectiveness of comprehensive or developmental youth programs. There is no getting around this. If a program is intended to remediate skills and educational deficits, there is at least the assumption that at-risk youth served by the JTPA program will do better in the local labor market than those with the same deficits who are not served. Only by tracking the employment experience of participants over time, can we judge the impact of the program. However, long-term (one to two years from termination) follow-up is expensive and few SDAs can afford the large samples required for scientifically-valid evaluation. But small samples or panels of follow-up participants are a much better alternative than no long-term follow-up at all. The PIC evaluation approach should include tracking of at least a small percentage of youth terminees for each year to learn how they make out in the labor force over time and to assess whether the program made a difference.

RESOURCE APPENDIX

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